



Unemployment

Chapter 25 of Marx's Capital, Volume 1, called [The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation](#), is about the effects of Capital on the workforce.

[Section 3](#) of Chapter 25 is concerned with what we nowadays refer to as Unemployment. Marx argues very directly and very convincingly in this section that unemployment is a necessary, constant, conscious and deliberate part of the capitalist system. He writes:

“The over-work of the employed part of the working-class swells the ranks of the reserve, whilst conversely the greater pressure that the latter by its competition exerts on the former, forces these to submit to overwork and to subjugation under the dictates of capital. The condemnation of one part of the working-class to enforced idleness by the overwork of the other part, and

the converse, becomes a means of enriching the individual capitalists”.

In the light of what Marx says here, it can be argued that all protestations from bourgeois democrats that they are intending to provide "jobs" for all of the unemployed are false.

Early in this chapter, Marx writes:

“[The] accelerated relative diminution of the variable constituent, that goes along with the accelerated increase of the total capital, and moves more rapidly than this increase, takes the inverse form, at the other pole, of an apparently absolute increase of the labouring population, an increase always moving more rapidly than that of the variable capital or the means of employment. But in fact, it is capitalistic accumulation itself that constantly produces, and produces in the direct ratio of its own energy and extent, a relatively redundant population of labourers, i.e., a population of greater extent than suffices for the average needs of the self-expansion of capital, and therefore a surplus-population.”

In other words, whatever may be the intention, it is capitalism itself that creates unemployment. The stories about the birthrate being too high, the immigration too much, the rent too high, the interest rate too high, et cetera, are wrong. The truth is that unemployment is intrinsic to capitalism, as much as employment is.

Although we are obliged to do everything possible to increase employment and to reduce unemployment, yet there is eventually no escape from unemployment within the capitalist mode of production.

What is required, as Marx wrote in “Value, Price and Profit”, is “abolition of the wages system”, and the wages-system’s replacement with another mode of production.

Picture: A South African mine worker (AP).

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Capital V1, C25, Section 3 on Unemployment](#).
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